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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Report on the inspection of the outcome of the consolidation of the three former economic and social departments into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Note by the Secretary-General

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B of 29 July 1994 and 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit, for the attention of the General Assembly, the attached report, conveyed to him by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, on the inspection of the outcome of the consolidation of the three former economic and social departments into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

2. The Secretary-General takes note of its findings and concurs with its recommendations.

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Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the inspection of the outcome of the consolidation of the three former economic and social departments into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Summary

In August and September 2000, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) reviewed the outcome of the consolidation of the three former economic and social departments of the Secretariat into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The primary concern of the review was to assess whether the reform had fulfilled its strategic goals to: (a) enhance the coherence of normative, analytical and operational functions; (b) provide more effective policy support to intergovernmental bodies; and (c) achieve greater effectiveness in coordinating United Nations activities in the socio-economic area through integrated policy advice. This review was complementary to a number of recently conducted or ongoing in-depth evaluations by OIOS of the substantive economic and social subprogrammes.

OIOS ascertained that through the consolidation, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has forged an effective substantive support to intergovernmental and inter-agency processes. It has managed to achieve greater coherence of policy and programme and has made a tangible contribution to revitalizing the work of the intergovernmental machinery. The merger has made it possible to carry analytical, normative and operational activities in a more mutually reinforcing manner. Furthermore, the Department took advantage of its new integrated capacity to introduce information technology into its work across the board. It also developed a new on-line system for programme performance management.

At the same time, OIOS concluded that more needs to be done to foster effective interaction among intergovernmental bodies, to improve the evaluation of development cooperation activities and to ensure the proactive follow-up on Organization-wide executive decisions. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs should take the lead in strengthening inter-agency collaboration at the working level on specific issues. Integration of programmes and promotion of teamwork must be extended and facilitated by professional networking. More support must be given to information technology activities so that showcase projects such as the Population Information Network (POPIN) can be continued.

OIOS made eight recommendations aimed at strengthening the coordinating function of the Department, promoting interdisciplinary cooperation at all levels and strengthening the application of information technology. They were fully accepted by the Department.

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I. Introduction

1. The efficiency, productivity and cohesiveness of United Nations activities in the economic and social areas has remained a long-standing legislative and executive concern. The relevant strategic thinking dates back more than 20 years.[1] In 1986, the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts recommended that the Organization eliminate duplication, strengthen coordination, streamline organizational arrangements and concentrate relevant capacities.[2] Subsequent General Assembly resolutions devoted to restructuring and revitalization in the economic and social fields[3] had a direct bearing on how the relevant Secretariat structures evolved.

2. The consequent organizational overhaul of the Secretariat was outlined by the Secretary-General at the beginning of 1992[4] and implemented by the end of 1993.[5] A number of units were eliminated and three departments were created encompassing the economic and social areas. That organizational set-up was the departure point for the most recent restructuring, which is the subject of the current report.

3. The conceptual framework for the new phase of organizational streamlining was provided by General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996. On 17 March 1997, the Secretary-General decided to merge the three Secretariat departments in the economic and social areas into a single department and to establish the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs. He emphasized that integrating support for policy formulation, analytical and normative functions and relevant technical cooperation activities would serve to reinforce the critical mass for implementing these activities and the overall effectiveness of the Secretariat, facilitate a further rationalization of economic and social work throughout the United Nations system and bring about, through consolidation, appreciable administrative savings.[6]

4. The Secretary-General envisaged enhancing the Secretariat's capacity to support the Economic and Social Council by establishing, within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, an identifiable substantive secretariat, which would work in close cooperation and collaboration with the relevant departments, funds and programmes and organizations and agencies of the United Nations system. In addition, a separate inter-agency affairs unit was created, reinforced by staff seconded by programmes and agencies, to service the Administrative Committee on Coordination and promote continuous exchange of information and consultation throughout the United Nations system.

5. In August and September 2000, OIOS reviewed the outcome of this consolidation. Since the substantive activities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs have been subject to a number of recently conducted or ongoing in-depth evaluations by the Office,[7] the current review focused primarily on broad, strategic aspects of the reform accomplishments. The primary concern was to assess whether the Department had managed to fully overcome the fragmentation of normative, analytical and operational capacities, to build up complementarity and synergy among its organizational components, to achieve, through greater coherence and innovation, more effective policy support to intergovernmental bodies and to enhance coordination.

II. Functions, organization and programme performance of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

6. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs was created on 17 March 1997 to:[8]

(a) Provide support to the Secretary-General, as well as to the intergovernmental processes in the economic, social and related fields;

(b) Support the coordination functions of central intergovernmental bodies, enhance system-wide policy coherence and provide a framework for promoting and monitoring the implementation of agreed plans, strategies, programmes or platforms of action;

(c) Monitor and assess, from a global as well as a gender perspective, economic and social policies and trends; elaborate projections and identify new and emerging issues; compile and disseminate analytical data, statistics and indicators with a view to facilitating development strategies at the international, regional and national levels;

(d) Provide advice and support with regard to the gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes;

(e) Support the efforts of the developing countries and countries with economies in transition to strengthen national capacities and promote the sharing of development expertise and best practices;

(f) Promote dialogue and cooperation with non-governmental organizations and major groups in civil society.

7. The organizational structure of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is reproduced in the annex to the present report. Concerning the programmatic dimension, the activities initially presented in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 under 10 subprogrammes in sections 7, 9 and 10, had been, where appropriate, merged into eight subprogrammes to be carried out by the Department.[9] The implementation rate of the total of 2,689 outputs mandated for the Department for the 1998-1999 biennium was 91 per cent, which was 3 percentage points higher than the average of 88 per cent for the Secretariat as a whole.[10] It compared favourably also with the cumulative average implementation rate of its three predecessor departments, which amounted to 84 per cent in 1996-1997.[11] The qualitative assessment of the Department programme performance in the 1998-1999 biennium reflected that, overall, the combination of increased outputs and reduced inputs pointed to an increase in the efficiency of programme delivery during the biennium.[12]

III. Policy support to intergovernmental bodies

8. The Secretary-General's reform envisaged that the role of the new, consolidated Department of Economic and Social Affairs was to enhance policy and programme coherence in the economic and social fields in support and strengthening of the policy-making and coordinating functions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. This entailed engaging all of the Department's substantive divisions, as well as the regional commissions and the United Nations funds and programmes comprising the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs. The reform also emphasized strengthening interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Administrative Committee on Coordination, enrolling the latter's subsidiary machinery in addressing themes of mutual interest to the Council and the specialized organizations and agencies.[13]

9. OIOS ascertained that the restructuring allowed the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination to develop a strong identity as the substantive secretariat of the Council, providing primary interface with the inter-agency process. The Division is well positioned to perform an important catalytic role in drawing on the Secretariat and system-wide analytical capacity for developing well-integrated policy advice to intergovernmental bodies. Its work has fostered coherent analytical, normative and operational follow-up to major policy programmes and decisions and has promoted information-sharing among major stakeholders. The direct links established with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide the Division with continuous access to a vast pool of potential partners and sources of information and expertise.

10. During the last three years, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs made a tangible contribution to the revitalization of the intergovernmental machinery and its enhanced efficiency. The use of such innovative mechanisms as panel discussions with outside resource persons, executive briefings, videoconferencing and the active involvement of representatives from civil society are evolving into an established practice. Cooperation was facilitated between the bureaux of the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly in reviewing their programmes of work to avoid overlap and duplication and to enhance complementarity. The Department was instrumental in regularizing the schedule of meetings and enhancing the efficiency of interaction between the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, energizing the collaboration between the secretariats of the functional commissions, streamlining and regrouping the Council's agenda, revitalizing its linkages with the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes and facilitating informal dialogue on cross-cutting themes. Consistent support was provided to fortifying the general segment of the Economic and Social Council as a venue for synthesizing the normative work of functional commissions and channelling the outcomes into the operational activities segment.[14] The Department made persistent efforts to prevent inconsistencies and duplications in the intergovernmental deliberations by providing current information on outcomes of

negotiations in the competent bodies and consistent advice on specific issues in different forums. The quality and timeliness of the documentation submitted to the intergovernmental bodies has also improved significantly.

11. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs successfully responded to the increased demand for its services by supplementing its limited resources, through collaboration with the support groups within the system. By giving visibility to the contributing organizations, they too were proactively involved in the work of the Economic and Social Council.

12. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs made an important contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council in assisting the Council in developing modalities of cooperation between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions: organizing meetings between the Economic and Social Council Ambassadors and Executive Directors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Executive Board of the World Bank and preparing, in consultation with the Bank and Fund, a note identifying topics for discussion on two broad policy concerns — the reform of the global financial system and fighting poverty in developing countries. Linkages at the level of governing bodies were supported by the strengthened cooperation within the Secretariat.

13. With regard to the intergovernmental subsidiary machinery of the Economic and Social Council, OIOS noted that the Department was aware of the need to achieve a truly effective interaction among the functional commissions and between them and the Council. In this connection, the Department needs to lead the way in establishing reliable and effective mechanisms for continuous and comprehensive exchange of information between the functional commissions, as well as for strengthening the coordinating role of the Council vis-à-vis the funds and programmes and the specialized agencies and organizations.

Focal point function of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

14. One of the important objectives of the 1997 consolidation was to further strengthen the coherence and impact of strategic policy advice to the central intergovernmental bodies concerning development cooperation and to attain an integrated policy response to emerging global development problems. The Department's role as a single focal point on these issues allowed it to effectively provide a substantive contribution to the comprehensive policy review by the General Assembly. That included an assessment of the United Nations development cooperation activities and a range of relevant policy recommendations, most of which were acted upon by the General Assembly.[15] Comprehensive information and policy advice to the Council's operational activities segment broke the ground with two substantive resolutions on poverty eradication and capacity-building.[16]

15. Further enhancement of those activities was constrained by the inadequate resources for carrying out required country-level evaluations and independent impact evaluations. To maintain the necessary scope and intensity of evaluations, appropriate funding should be ensured. In the meantime, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs took a proactive approach in coping with the resource constraints by improving the management system in this area, developing a more flexible and expedient support to research and evaluations and strengthening the outreach to main partners, including greater use of national involvement. While staff expertise was addressed through a targeted training programme, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should persist in enhancing the efficiency of research and evaluations concerning the assessment of cooperation for development.

16. The new, consolidated Department has managed to focus and energize the organizational capacity in support of interaction between the main intergovernmental bodies and NGOs and civil society. The strong presence of the Department on the Internet facilitated outreach to civil society and gave wider public exposure to economic and social activities of the United Nations. To facilitate NGO involvement, the Department conducted extensive training on technical requirements of applying for consultative status as well as on the rights and responsibilities that such status invokes. Work is under way on constructing a comprehensive NGO database, which will provide a ready source of the varied expertise existent in civil society. The galvanized infrastructure of NGO engagement facilitated coalition-building around topics of interest to the Economic and Social Council and led to more effective participation of NGOs at the Council's high-level segment.

IV. Coordination issues

System-wide coordination

17. One important function of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was to assist the Secretary-General in enhancing policy coherence and coordination both within the United Nations and among organizations of the United Nations system.[17] The Department convenes and coordinates the work of the United Nations Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, the highest level secretariat body responsible for ensuring the overall coherence and complementarity in its area of responsibility and serving as an instrument of policy development and decision-making. In the area of inter-agency coordination, the Department provides a useful link to specialized agencies in obtaining clear, effective and coherent policy guidance from the Economic and Social Council and supports the effectiveness of the functioning of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and strengthening the interaction between the Council and the Administrative Committee.

18. The Department made a decisive contribution to the proactive and creative approach to cross-cutting issues by the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs. The Department assisted the Executive Committee in producing position papers to guide the work of the Secretariat as a whole, including the Department itself, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the regional commissions, and in preparing its submissions to intergovernmental bodies in key policy areas such as financial architecture, external debt and the social dimensions of macroeconomic policy. The Department also assisted the Executive Committee in the review and dissemination of "flagship" reports of different economic and social entities and in proposing to the General Assembly projects for the utilization of the Development Account. The cooperation with the United Nations Development Group was facilitated, with particular focus on the contribution of the Executive Committee to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.[18] The technical and substantive support provided to the Executive Committee also included the creation of the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS), which provides comprehensive, up-to-date data on all United Nations activities in the social and economic fields, as well as relevant documentation on those activities.[19]

19. At the same time, OIOS noted that the size of the membership of the Executive Committee and its geographical dispersion over seven time zones presented challenges vis-à-vis its deliberations, decision-making and follow-up. The momentum in building up the efficiency of this new coordination mechanism should not be allowed to slacken. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs should improve links between its member entities at the Secretariat level and ensure more consistent monitoring of the actions taken pursuant to its conclusions and decisions.

20. In regard to the system-wide coordination, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs had to take advantage of its consolidated capabilities in pursuing a two-pronged task: to promote greater collaboration between the organizations of the United Nations system in furthering the goals of development by contributing to the effectiveness of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, and to enhance the interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Administrative Committee. Efforts were made to assist the Economic and Social Council in advancing its interaction with the governing bodies of specialized organizations and agencies by ensuring that relevant conclusions and decisions of the Council were put on their agendas. The Department also serves as the focal point for reporting to the Council on a number of cross-cutting issues impinging on development, including HIV/AIDS, gender, cultural development, communication for development, and international years and anniversaries.

21. The secretariat support to the Administrative Committee on Coordination has been focused on the substantive purpose of inter-agency coordination — to ensure that all sectors related to development are effectively integrated in support of global strategies. An integral part of the support is the management of a coherent interaction between many of the new programme initiatives launched by various agencies in the context of the interrelated dimensions of globalization. The main challenge for the Department in this regard is to develop a comprehensive system-wide strategy employing the comparative advantages of relevant organizations in pursuit of the global agenda.

22. OIOS noted that the Committee for Programme and Coordination was satisfied with the improvements in the content and format of the reporting practices of the Administrative Committee on Coordination as well as with the more dynamic and productive dialogue between the Administrative Committee and the main intergovernmental bodies.[20] Earlier, in related substantive resolutions, the General Assembly reaffirmed the central role of the United Nations in promoting international cooperation for development and greater policy coherence on global development issues[21] and encouraged the secretariats of relevant conventions and international organizations to strengthen cooperation in implementing intergovernmental accords and decisions at international, regional and national levels.[22] This guidance underscores the importance of the support given by the Department to the Administrative Committee in fostering comprehensive, multilevel coordination and in critically assessing its progress.

Operational coordination

23. While OIOS was impressed with the input of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to advancing policy coordination at the macro level, it observed that its thrust and momentum do not always trickle down to the lower, specialized levels of the subsidiary machinery of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. In some of the programmatic and operational subcommittees, the level of cooperation hardly advanced further than the exchange of information and potential joint projects in analysis and projections had never come to the fore because of a rigid managerial outlook and lack of vision. Opportunities for resource savings through collaboration and synergy in some cases remained unrealized.

* *The Department of Economic and Social Affairs reported that the OIOS observation in this regard is in line with the overall reforms of the Administrative Committee on Coordination under way. In 1999, the Secretary-General launched a review of the Administrative Committee and its subsidiary machinery, which has recently been completed and has entered into the implementation phase. One of the objectives of the reform is to ensure that policy coordination becomes an operational concept at all levels of the subsidiary machinery and not only at the level of principals. The move away from standing committees to a more flexible task-oriented approach, which has also been recommended in the reform process, should further serve to promote a less rigid system of cooperation.**

24. The leading role of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as the main coordinating body of the follow-up processes to global conferences is not equally effective in each substantive area. In some thematic sectors, the Secretariat, funds, programmes and agencies coordinate their efforts mostly in an ad hoc manner, publishing their own policy guidelines, manuals and other authoritative documents without much of an intrasectoral coordination. Interdisciplinary team-building in such cases remains an elusive goal.

25. The designation of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs as the programme manager for the Development Account was an important element in the reform of the Secretariat's socio-economic sphere.[23] To date, the balance of the Account is $26.1 million, resulting from productivity gains during the biennia 1996-1997 and 1998-1999. The General Assembly, in resolution 54/15 of 19 November 1999, approved modalities for operating the Development Account. The Account provides important supplementary resources for the implementation of advisory and technical cooperation development activities at a time when extrabudgetary resources are stagnant, or in decline. To date, 23 projects aimed at the promotion of development activities and capacity-building, in particular through regional and interregional economic and technical cooperation among developing countries, have been approved. A rigorous process of screening the proposals by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly impacts positively on focus and design of the proposals and their alignment with priorities of the medium-term plan. OIOS noted that these projects were described in detail on the Department's web site.

26. OIOS also noted that the coordinating function of the Department, which encompasses substantive, management and administrative support to the

* The comments of DESA appear in italics throughout the report.

Development Account projects, is carried out within the available resources of the department. Given the prevailing resource limitations and the growing overall workload of the Department, the essential functions of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the Development Account projects has yet to be matched with an adequate capacity to initiate them.

V. Programmatic fusion

27. By consolidating research and analysis, coordination and policy support and technical cooperation under common executive direction, the Secretary-General's reform sought to strengthen the United Nations capacity to carry out these functions in a mutually reinforcing manner and to enhance the critical mass necessary for advancing the overarching goals of development. Through the consolidation, the divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs acquired both normative and operational capacity to foster linkages between the three core competencies of the Department. OIOS observed that the dimensions were now better equipped to ensure that operational activities flow from normative work and benefit from research and that technical expertise tested at the field level provides a feedback to analysis and policy advice.

28. The organizational ideas broached by the management of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs stressed interdisciplinary flexibility, modalities facilitating team-building and creating a capacity for the strategic analysis of emerging issues. It was intended to use the substantial statistical and research capacity of the Department more effectively in order to raise the quality of the parliamentary documentation and publications. It was also envisaged to move beyond intra-divisional coordination to joint planning and action on cross-cutting issues through inter-divisional teams, as well as to establish modalities to ensure that in each division operational work would flow from normative work and benefit from research and analysis. As part of such modalities, the divisions that have a substantial operational activity were to specify well-defined "product lines" for advisory services to Member States and technical support for field projects linked clearly to their analytical and normative responsibilities.

29. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs made marked progress towards achieving these goals. In its recent in-depth evaluations of the Department's subprogrammes and during a review of relevant earlier recommendations, OIOS noted that a viable interface was created between global policies and national action and between research, policy and operational activities. The collaboration between programme areas has improved and a few inter-divisional thematic groups were set up on the cross-cutting issues such as poverty, finance, gender and technology. At the same time, the in-depth evaluations noted that the potential for joint activities was not fully realized and recommended, inter alia, that interaction between analytical functions and operational activities be strengthened.[24]

30. The declared policy of nourishing the culture of interdisciplinary fusion in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is promoted by the senior management and has brought about some tangible results. The Department's Discussion Paper Series was established to give greater visibility to individual research and the papers in the series have been posted on a dedicated web site. Web sites covering the wide range of the Department's activities were established through joint efforts. Gender mainstreaming has advanced throughout many substantive activities, linkages between research and operational activities were strengthened in some divisions and cross-divisional thematic teams proved their worth in providing leadership on a number of the pivotal issues. OIOS was satisfied that the Department's immediate plans envisage providing solid statistical and analytical backstopping to its technical cooperation activities and ensuring that those activities also serve to advance global policy objectives. These plans recognize the crucial importance of strengthening a critical mass of professional capacity through team-building, envisage aligning analysis and research closer to policy development and technical cooperation and aim at promoting more systematic feedback between field experience and central policy processes.

31. The preparation of *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, which was a collaborative effort of various divisions of the Department, provides an example of interdisciplinary culture in action. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women raised funds to support the preparation of the publication. The Statistics Division compiled and organized the statistical material for the publication and undertook analytical and editorial work. The Division of the Advancement of Women and

the Population Division provided special studies, statistics and substantive guidance in their fields of expertise.

32. Another effective cooperative effort on the analytical front was the preparation of a wall chart on basic social services for all and the publication *Charting the Progress of Populations*. Under the auspices of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Task Force on Basic Social Services for All, the Population Division of the Department coordinated with several United Nations agencies (the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the preparation of a wall chart measuring progress in achieving the goals and objectives identified in the programmes of action of the series of global conferences of the 1990s. The wall chart was later expanded at the request, and in collaboration with, the Division for Social Development, into an analytic background document for the preparatory process leading up to the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world".

33. There are currently four thematic groups in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, on: poverty; financing for development; a network on African development (to which other departments of the Secretariat have been invited); and NGOs. These groups are a vehicle for horizontal communication on substantive issues and the springboard for inter-divisional collaboration on specific outputs, including intergovernmental reports. It is expected that thematic groups will ensure increasing coherence and commonality of approaches among different divisions in the preparation of parliamentary documentation and publications on cross-cutting issues, such as poverty and globalization. Joint preparation of reports on cross-cutting issues should become the norm. Equally important, thematic groups provide junior professionals, many of whom presently do not have opportunities to be engaged in a broad programmatic framework of the Department, as well as professionals from other divisions, with exposure to the range of work undertaken by the Department.

Limitations and challenges to the thematic approach

34. The current inspection observed, however, that while the nucleus of the new interactive culture has formed, the viable mechanisms to promote it throughout the organizational hierarchy have yet to take root. There were still instances of insufficient interchange of information between the divisions of the Department regarding their programmes of work and opportunities to interact in the achievement of the programmatic objectives. Basic channels and instruments for the sharing of information and team-building need to be further developed. While the Department has an effective structure for vertical communication and control in place, horizontal thematic and operational interaction remains sporadic. There was still evidence of compartmentalization, not only between some of the divisions, but also between branches. There were no incentives in place for staff from different subject areas to volunteer for an interdisciplinary team and no mechanism to account for their contribution. Such delegation remained at the discretion of their supervisors and required a specific case-by-case consideration and approval through the organizational hierarchy. The initiative of convening an interdisciplinary team was rarely, if ever, taken at the horizontal level. Such weaknesses are certainly not unique to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and are also contingent on pertinent personnel management issues. However, OIOS would encourage the Department, as the most thematically diverse department of the Secretariat, to show initiative and vision in tackling those issues.

35. To ensure that the policy of programmatic fusion trickles down throughout the Department, encouragement from the top should be underpinned by persistent and practical action. Possible conflicts between planned work and interdisciplinary team assignments have to be considered, and incentive schemes, time management arrangements and links between an individual input into team work and individual performance appraisals have to be explored. The situation concerning horizontal professional communication within divisions should be reviewed with staff participation and managerial "turf protection" actively discouraged.

- *The Department of Economic and Social Affairs agrees that a compartmentalized approach within and between divisions limits the potential for mutual programmatic enrichment. The weekly Directors' meetings chaired by the Under-Secretary-General act as the principal vehicle for programmatic fusion. The monthly Directors' meeting on technical cooperation chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for policy coordination and inter-agency affairs serves a similar function for the Department's technical cooperation activities. At the working level, apart from the thematic groups, which foster such cooperation, a special effort is being made on two substantive areas that would provide for greater, working-level, coordination. The first is in long-term development trends, an area in which OIOS has itself made far reaching recommendations (see E/AC.51/2000/2), and an area where each of the Divisions of the Department makes a substantive contribution to the core work of the Division for Policy Analysis and Development. The second relates to understanding the implications of globalization and interdependence for the entire programme of economic and social affairs. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs believes that, with an increased focus on areas such as these, greater divisional synergies would be created. A substantive interdivisional retreat, bringing together staff at different levels, to discuss the topic "globalization and the role of the United Nations" is envisaged for January 2001.*

36. One of the challenges of reform was to strengthen mutual reinforcement and feedback between analytical work and technical cooperation and to restructure the project portfolio in accordance with the comparative advantages of the consolidated Department. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs provided training in various aspects of technical cooperation to staff previously engaged only in research activities, designated relevant focal points within each Division and introduced monthly reporting on project budgets and delivery along with regular joint review by the senior management of lessons learned and the issues to be resolved. To enhance Departmental synergies, two interregional advisers focused on the provision of advisory services in connection with the financing for development process and the follow-up to global conferences and on the elaboration of interdisciplinary training projects. Administratively, a mechanism was established to underpin participation by multiple divisions in one project — by recognizing a partner's input at the project budget-line level while allowing the lead division to maintain overall management responsibility and ensure project coherence. The technical cooperation capacities of the consolidated Department were publicized to potential beneficiaries through the network of Resident Coordinators and a special web site.

37. OIOS noted that the Department makes consistent efforts to counteract declining extrabudgetary resources for technical cooperation by studying the evolving requirements of the beneficiary countries against the comparative advantages and executing capacity of the Department. Two such distinct advantages were identified: a multidisciplinary capability for implementing multifaceted projects and an acquired expertise in monitoring and evaluation of nationally executed projects enhanced by strong skills in data collection and analysis. The limited funding available under section 21 of the 1998-1999 programme budget, "Regular programme of technical cooperation" and from the Development Account was used to maintain and strengthen the advisory capacity of the Department, with emphasis on operationally oriented research studies and gearing analytical work closer to country-level experience.

38. In the view of OIOS, the Department's adoption of a multidisciplinary approach to technical cooperation, the integration of that approach into the work of the substantive divisions under central policy guidance, and the decentralization of relevant management responsibilities to the divisions is innovative and has considerable potential. Its immediate impact, however, is not well pronounced: the share of projects with a multidivisional involvement in the overall technical cooperation portfolio remains low. Obviously, a certain time lag is unavoidable before the instituted policy produces results. OIOS strongly encourages the Department to stay the course.

VI. Management issues

39. The outcome of the consolidation exercise was expected to include a streamlined management structure for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and more consistent strategic guidance to the

totality of the social and economic activities of the Secretariat as well as greater room for initiative on the part of substantive divisions, a considerable reduction in posts and commensurate cost savings. Concerning the latter, altogether 56 posts were abolished through the consolidation of the three former departments into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, including 25 administrative posts, resulting in total savings of $14.4 million.[25] The consolidation also envisaged the formulation of the staff development framework of the Department, comprising training, enhanced staff mobility and increased participation in external professional events, including exchanges with leading economic and social institutions.

40. OIOS noted the consistent and effective management of personnel aspects of the consolidation exercise, which were quite significant during its initial phase. The consultations and subsequent redeployment of staff were conducted in a fair and transparent manner. The team-building retreats brought together staff from three different departments into newly integrated divisions and catalyzed cohesion and a sense of common mission throughout the new department. A number of other initiatives in support of a more efficient use of staff resources were also laid out.

41. Some of those initiatives were more successful than others. The consistent attention to streamlining vacancy management and advancing recruitment action resulted in reducing the professional vacancy rate from 12.3 per cent in 1998 to 8 per cent in October 2000. The Performance Appraisal System was fully and effectively implemented. The Department has been proactive in providing training to upgrade substantive and electronic data processing skills. However, projects aimed at underpinning staff networking and supporting interdivisional teamwork are so far progressing slowly.

The Integrated Monitoring and Documentation System (IMDIS) — an innovative management tool

42. One of the commendable initiatives of the Department in strengthening overall performance discipline was the development of an on-line programme performance management facility known as the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation System (IMDIS). Its development has had a significant impact well beyond the social and economic areas of the Secretariat: OIOS utilized it as the main instrument for reporting on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999, incorporating a number of other substantive departments, offices, funds and programmes into IMDIS. Its application resulted in considerable Secretariat-wide savings in the costs of programme performance reporting.

43. IMDIS was designed as a management tool to facilitate continuous and comprehensive monitoring of progress in the implementation of programmed outputs by managers at different levels. Activities in IMDIS are organized according to categories defined in the programme budget. Primary responsibility for monitoring and reporting rests with the divisional directors of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and information entered by them into the system becomes immediately and automatically available to the Under-Secretary-General, allowing him to obtain a full picture of the status of implementation at any point in time for each of more than 3,500 individual programmed outputs, as well as the implementation indicators for any of eight subprogrammes and for the Department as a whole.

44. The development of IMDIS is a good example of how the consolidated capacity of the Department produced benefits for the whole Organization. The Department not only served as a catalyst for advanced technology, but demonstrated in the spirit of the reform, genuine teamwork by making its expertise available Organization-wide. The system currently contains inventories of activities for all sections of the programme budget for 2000-2001 and also retains the 1998-1999 data for historical reference and for the facilitation of comparison of work programmes across biennia. In addition to the programme of work as found in the regular programme budget for the current biennium, IMDIS also includes the activities and outputs of its section 33, "Development Account", to assist all departments in tracking the implementation of relevant projects.

45. While OIOS was encouraged by the Under-Secretary-General's commitment to full-fledged incorporation of IMDIS into the departmental programme performance management mechanism, it is of the view that regular, quarterly reviews at the senior staff meetings of the utilization of IMDIS by divisions, branches and sections would considerably facilitate this process.

Other technological advances

46. One of the areas where the advantages of consolidation were successfully utilized by the management was the consistent introduction of information and communication technology and computer-based processes throughout the Department of Economic Affairs. Information technology is employed to enhance the key outreach functions of the Department, to strengthen data collection and analytical work and to advance the Department's technical cooperation programme and other activities that directly support developing countries.

47. Currently, the Department maintains 27 web sites, two of which are accessible in all six official languages of the United Nations, to support major programmes, conferences and meetings for which the Department is responsible. They support the key outreach function to the Governments, various development institutions, NGOs and the general public. Some of them, such as WomenWatch and the Population Information Network (POPIN) have received worldwide recognition as gateways for interactive information exchange, capacity-building and coordination. Others, such as the financing for development web site, became a valuable reference source for national delegations engaged in preparation for high-level events. The United Nations Online Network of Regional Institutions for Capacity Building in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) will make available relevant expertise and training facilities to developing countries engaged in improving the effectiveness of their civil services and administrative systems. It will provide on-line interactive advisory services, training programmes, conferences and workshops. The web site "Instruments for Change" contains a database of national policy instruments in use for promoting sustainable development in various countries. The web site of the global network of small island developing States facilitates exchange of information between them, serves as a platform for consensus building and enables more effective coordination and action on pressing issues. The divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs also maintain a number of powerful dedicated information and communication technology projects in their substantive areas, including the Expert Group Meeting on Short- and Medium-term Projections of the World Economy (Project LINK), the United Nations Economic and Social Information System (UNESIS), the "Social Summit digital library", and the "Administration and cost of elections" database.

48. The development of these information and communication technology projects relies mainly on each division's capacity with assistance from the Information Support Unit of the Department and the Information Technology Services Division of the Office of Central Support Services. OIOS noted that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs established a useful intradepartmental coordination mechanism, the Information Technology Group, comprising the focal points of the divisions. The departmental information and communication technology policy encourages exchange of expertise through networking between staff engaged in such projects.

49. While the Information Support Unit provides crucial technical skills and support to information and communication technology projects, strengthening it to the level of a full-fledged clearinghouse for the exchange of skills and the conduit of networking both internally, system-wide and with the information and communication technology industry would enhance the effectiveness and reliability of common support structure for these projects within the Department.

A specific resource support concern

50. With regard to the information technology outreach framework of the Department, OIOS noted with serious concern the faltering resource support to and declining functionality of the United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN). The network has consistently promoted the use of new technology since its establishment as the first Internet site for population data in 1993. POPIN, covering all geographical regions and highlighting best practices and modern approaches, has evolved into a capacity-building tool facilitating the establishment, operation and interlinkages between regional and national web sites on population activities. The global interest in POPIN was reflected in the five million accesses in 1999.[26]

51. OIOS noted that POPIN had received several international awards for excellence. POPIN's early and innovative use of the Internet is now commonly accepted as a model in the field of population and development. In the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and

Development in 1994, it was observed that "The tremendous potential of print, audio-visual and electronic media, including databases and networks such as the United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN), should be harnessed to disseminate technical information and to promote and strengthen understanding of the relationships between population, consumption, production and sustainable development".[27] On numerous occasions, the Department highlighted POPIN as a showcase of networking and capacity-building, which deserves to be emulated in other substantive areas. Most recently, POPIN was given a prominent place in the information kit "Information and Technology for the World". Numerous citations of POPIN have been made at international forums.[28]

52. The network was developed and maintained by the global POPIN Coordinating Unit in the Department. While POPIN was "owned" by the Department, it was supported entirely through extrabudgetary contributions by UNFPA. OIOS found little evidence that any viable, timely measures to secure financial support for POPIN were taken, although UNFPA had informed the Department that resources supporting POPIN would be discontinued. In this connection, OIOS noted that on 30 March 2000, at its thirty-third session, the Commission on Population and Development strongly recommended the continuation of POPIN and urgently requested that all efforts be made by the Population Division and the United Nations Population Fund to find and secure stable funding for the activities of this valuable network.[29]

53. Currently, the capacity of the POPIN Coordinating Unit is severely reduced and the network development stalled. The Coordinator, who was the energetic driving force behind its innovative development, is demoralized and has no clear view of the future of the Network or her own role. OIOS believes that immediate action is necessary to secure the continuity of POPIN in the light of the Department's commitment to foster innovation and best practices.

- *In this regard, the Department commented that over the years UNFPA has been entrusted with the responsibility of raising funds for population projects, including those implemented by the Population Division, of which POPIN is a part. The Department has, on many occasions, discussed with Member States and UNFPA the issue of the importance of UNFPA's continued funding of POPIN. One such recent proposal was submitted to UNFPA for funding during the period 2000-2003 and is under active consideration. UNFPA has also indicated to the Population Division that, subject to the availability of funding, which at this point remains uncertain for the next funding cycle, UNFPA would be favourably disposed to the continuation of the POPIN project. The Population Division is striving to continue collaboration with UNFPA to carry the POPIN project forward. This challenge should be seen within the context of the financial constraints facing UNFPA as well as the United Nations.*

54. OIOS is of the view that the above comments of the Department do not explain why no timely and proactive measures were taken to secure the viability of POPIN. OIOS emphasizes the need for immediate action to implement the above-mentioned recommendation of the Commission on Population to secure stable funding for POPIN activities.

VII. Conclusions

55. Since the consolidation of the three former departments into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 1997, the Department has made decisive and remarkable progress in implementing the strategic goals of the reform. Its support to intergovernmental processes has become proactive, comprehensive and effective. The Department's coordinating role in inter-agency affairs acquired a new dimension, catalyzed system-wide cohesion and enhanced unity of action in the social and economic areas. The integration of normative, analytical and operational functions is well under way. The management's commitment to developing the Department as the focal node of the international search for responses to the challenges of development and globalization and the centre of excellence in socio-economic analysis and policy advice has been proven.

56. However, the commitment to excellence, coherence and innovation is not always as forcefully replicated at the divisional and working levels of the Department. OIOS found instances when the strategies for change had lost its momentum or was distorted into

pro forma exercises. In some areas compartmentalization still exists, with interdisciplinary teamwork remaining an exception rather than the norm. OIOS appreciated the Department's healthy decentralization of managerial discretion to the divisions, but would like to stress that accountability should be consistently applied to the discharge of these enhanced responsibilities and should be subject to periodic reviews at the highest level.

VIII. Recommendations

57. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs should draw up a long-term comprehensive plan of action to strengthen its substantive support to the work of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. It should ensure that the work of each commission reinforces the others in advancing the cross-cutting goals set by the United Nations conferences and summits on socio-economic issues. Part of such a plan should be devoted to establishing a viable mechanism for promoting mutually supportive policies among the United Nations agencies and organizations in pursuance of those goals (SP-00-002-1) (see paras. 11-13 above).

58. A set of measures should be introduced to secure sufficient resources for evaluation of the operational activities for development of the United Nations, including seeking extrabudgetary funding as appropriate. Concurrently, the capacity for relevant in-house research and evaluations should be further developed through training, streamlining work processes and applying more effective research methodologies (SP-00-002-2) (see para. 15 above).

59. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs should develop, in consultation with the secretariats of the members of the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs, the monitoring modalities concerning the implementation of the Committee decisions. Reports on the status of implementation should be prepared for the consideration of the Executive Committee, with periodicity to be determined by the Executive Committee (SP-00-002-3) (see paras. 18-19 above).

60. Strategic coordination at the top inter-agency level should be translated into effective cooperation in specific areas at the lower levels of the subsidiary machinery of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Based on experience gained in inter-agency projects in the areas of statistics and gender issues, the Department should provide leadership in fostering innovative, timely and cost-effective inter-agency collaboration for problem-specific tasks and projects in other subprogrammes. The capacities of the secretariats of the subsidiary bodies of the Administrative Committee on Coordination should be fully mobilized towards that end, in order to utilize the existing complementarities and system-wide synergies. (SP-00-002-4) (see paras. 23-24 above).

61. The Department should review the current arrangements for monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the Development Account projects and develop modalities ensuring that these functions are carried out comprehensively and effectively (SP-00-002-5) (see paras. 25-26 above).

62. Building on the positive experience gained through the work of four existing thematic groups on poverty, financing for development, African development and NGOs, the Department should ensure that interdisciplinary interaction becomes a permanent feature of its work culture. Effective measures should be taken to discourage managerial obstruction to horizontal professional interaction whenever it occurs. Practical support should be provided to staff volunteering to participate in interdisciplinary teamwork (SP-00-002-6) (see paras. 27-35 and 38 above).

63. The Department should consider ways of developing the Information Support Unit into an effective, forward-looking centre for solving information and communication technology problems, skills promotion and the exchange of experience and a facilitator for access to technological information (SP-00-002-7) (see paras. 45-49 above).

64. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs should take urgent action to mobilize resources to restore POPIN to full capacity and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the network (SP-00-002-8) (see paras. 50-53 above).

(*Signed*) Dileep **Nair**
Under-Secretary-General for
Internal Oversight Services

Notes

[1] See resolution 32/197.

[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first session, Supplement No. 49* (A/41/49), paras. 39-41.

[3] See resolutions 45/177, 45/264, 46/232 and 46/235.

[4] See A/46/882.

[5] See ST/SGB/Organization/Amend.1.

[6] See A/51/829.

[7] See E/AC.51/2000/2, E/AC.51/2000/3 and E/AC.51/2000/4. The in-depth evaluations of population and sustainable development subprogrammes are currently in progress.

[8] ST/SGB/1997/9, para. 2.1.

[9] E/AC.51/1998/6, sect. 7A.

[10] A/55/73, table 1.

[11] A/53/122, annex I.

[12] A/55/73, annex, sect. 7A.

[13] A/52/584, para.12; A/53/676, p. 3.

[14] See also E/2000/67; A/51/137-E/1998/66; and A/54/115-E/1999/59.

[15] See resolution 53/192.

[16] E/1999/5 and E/1999/6.

[17] ST/SGB/1997/9, para. 2.1 (d).

[18] The United Nations Development Group, established in 1997, brings together United Nations entities in order to increase the effectiveness and impact of development operations. It is led by an Executive Committee comprised of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and WHO. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework is a strategic planning and collaborative programming framework aimed at identifying priorities for United Nations development efforts and enhancing their coherence and effectiveness.

[19] The application of the Integrated Management and Documentation Information System (IMDIS) to programme management is addressed below in paras. 48-53.

[20] A/55/16, paras. 272-296.

[21] Resolution 54/231, para. 1.

[22] Resolution 54/217, para. 5.

[23] The creation of the Development Account was proposed by the Secretary-General in his report "Renewing the United Nations: a programme of reform" (A/51/950 and Add.1-7), Action 21.

[24] See E/AC.51/2000/2; E/AC.51/2000/3; and E/AC.51/2000/4.

[25] A/52/303, para. 7A.1 and table 1.

[26] E/CN.9/2000/6, para. 39.

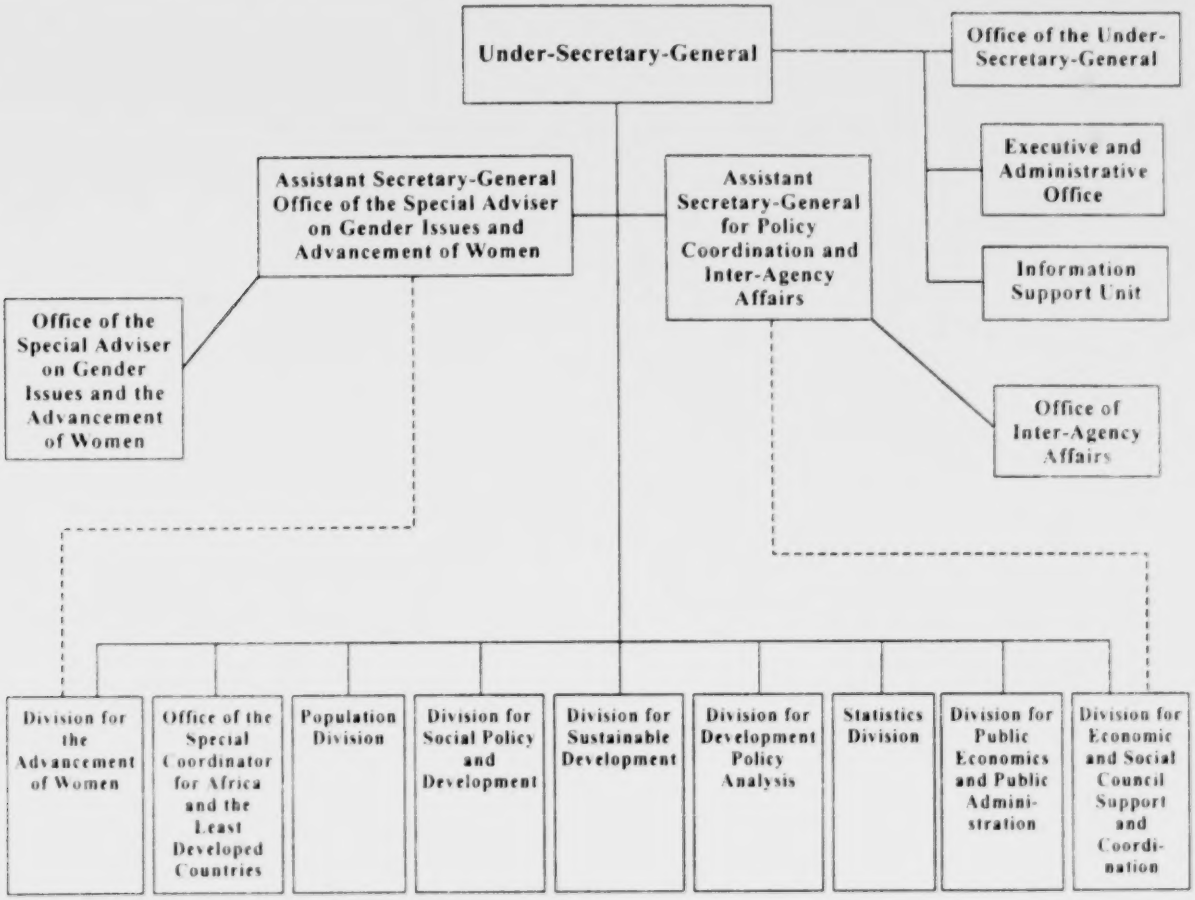
[27] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo*, 5-13 September 1994 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 2, annex, para. 11.22.

[28] A/51/314, para.19; E/2000/10/Add.2, para. 57; and E/2000/94, para. 57.

[29] E/2000/25-E/CN.9/2000/7, para. 31.

Annex

Organization chart of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs


Under-Secretary-General
Office of the Under-Secretary-General
Executive and Administrative Office
Information Support Unit
Assistant Secretary-General Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs
Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women
Office of Inter-Agency Affairs
Division for the Advancement of Women
Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries
Population Division
Division for Social Policy and Development
Division for Sustainable Development
Division for Development Policy Analysis
Statistics Division
Division for Public Economics and Public Administration
Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination

Source: A/54/6/Rev.1, vol. II, sect. 9, p. 342, as clarified by the Department.